

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

RE'EH

AUGUST 23, 2014

27 AB 5774

Rosh Hodesh Elul is Tuesday and Wednesday

We begin to say selichot on Thursday – See new Tefilah and Class Schedule with Selichot

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting Friday evening 7:24 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP
Beginning next Friday, Mincha will be at Candle Lighting time through the fall, winter and spring

SHABBAT Class at 8:30, Relevant Daily Halachot based upon the teaching of HaRav Ovadia Yosef
Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:50 AM

Ernie Davidson in honor of the marriage of his daughter Ali to Jesse DiPlacido.
May they have many simchas now and throughout their lives

Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one
Anyone wishing to do a Dairy Kiddush with hot food must speak with Rabbi Colish in advance.

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30

Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at Benai Asher from 5:30 to 6:30

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon at 6:15

Mincha at 6:55 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 7:25

Seudah Shelishi Class with R' David

Birkat HaMazon at 8:05 Arbit at 8:10 - Shabbat Ends – 8:23

Sisterhood Meeting Sunday at 9AM

Planning for the Labor Day Barbecue

LABOR DAY BARBECUE – see flyer inside

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

Rosh Chodesh – Tuesday and Wednesday at 6:50 am

David Bellehsen will be sponsoring breakfast Wednesday morning.

Selichot begins Thursday and Each day at 6:15AM

We have been having a great Sunday morning class with Sam Yusupov 9AM

Looking for Breakfast sponsors

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM – Beginning on Thursday with Selichot – class will be at 5:45AM

Sunday Mornings 7:30

Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.

Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

YU is proud to announce an exciting semester of Women's Beit Midrash. This 6-week program will take place at the Yeshiva University Museum (15 West 16th Street) on Wednesdays, October 29 - December 3, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Sessions will feature Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, Director of the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, Yeshiva University and Dr. Jacob Wisse, Director of Yeshiva University Museum and Associate Professor of Art History, Stern College for Women who will co-present on the topic of: "The Image and the Idea: An Interdisciplinary Seminar on Art History and Jewish Thought."

We encourage you to let members of your congregation know about this unique opportunity to learn from and with our renowned Yeshiva University faculty.

For more information and to register for the courses, please visit www.yu.edu/sternlearn.

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through October 30th – Please join us! 212-289-2100

MITZVAH OPPORTUNITY

I have a 103-year-old grandmother living in Grandell nursing home (645 W Broadway between Grand Blvd and Lindell Blvd). She is fully functioning but not ambulatory. I was wondering if you had any people in your community who wouldn't mind going to visit and talk with her a once a week to a few times per week. This can be one person or many people. She is extremely interesting and the experience can be quite educational: she remembers World War I in Ukraine and her emigration through Europe into Ellis Island.

Editors Notes

Sorry about the delay in this week's newsletter. I had some schedule interruptions this week and my typical agenda became messed up. I didn't get my usual Jewish Voice article written this week and I am just hoping to get something out to our newsletter readers.

One quick thought we mentioned this morning in the Synagogue relating to the portion and current events is based on the opening verse. Moses tells the Jewish People that they can be the recipients of either blessings or curses -- blessings if they observe G d's commandments, and curses if they do not. The blessings will be proclaimed on Mount Grizzim while the curses will be announced on Mount Ebal. We will read the details of this ceremony in a few weeks.

It is important to remember that someone's idea of a vengeful god sitting in heaven waiting for us to mess up so that he can zap us with a thunderbolt is not a Jewish idea. We must believe that everything that Hashem does for us or to us is for the best. This is especially crucial when we don't understand.

Rabbi Akiba is known for his statement learned by the example of his teacher Nachum Ish Gamzu, "Whatever God does, He does for the best". As the Talmud in Berachot tells us, once, being unable to find any sleeping accommodation in a certain city,

Rabbi Akiba was forced to spend the night in the forest outside the city walls. Without a murmur he resigned himself to this hardship; and even when a lion devoured his donkey, and a cat killed the rooster whose crowing was to announce the dawn to him, and the wind extinguished his candle, the only remark he made was, "All that God does is for the good." When morning dawned he learned how true his words were. A band of robbers had fallen upon the city and carried its inhabitants into captivity, but he had escaped because his camp had not been noticed in the fire lacking darkness, and neither his donkey nor his rooster was there to betray him.

Someone mentioned that whenever we get too comfortable, Hashem seems to remind us that Esav hates Jacob and Yishmael these days hates us even more. Bilaam exclaimed "Hen am levadad yishkon u'bagoyim lo yitchashav," " It is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations". Rabbenu Bachya, explains that the source of the separateness of Israel as rooted in its Torah and faith.

Whatever happens, we have to look for the message and the good. It's often not easy and generations or millennia may pass before we begin to understand.

This week President Barack Obama condemned the ISIS beheading of American James Foley in the strongest terms. This is what he said: "There has to be a common effort to extract this cancer so it does not spread. There has to be a clear rejection of this kind of nihilistic ideologies. One thing we can all agree on is group like (ISIS) has no place in the 21st century. Friends and allies around the world, we share a common security a set of values opposite of what we saw yesterday. We will continue to confront this hateful terrorism and replace it with a sense of hope and stability."

I would love to ask him why Hamas is different. If one can react so strongly to the murder of an American journalist, why hold back Israel from responding just as powerfully to the murderers of three teens, one being an American boy?

Why do the front pages of the newspapers and the lead stories on network news bury the fact that after accusing Israel of a conspiracy, a senior Hamas official, Saleh Al-Arouri, admitted finally that his group had carried out the "heroic" act of kidnapping and murdering Naftali Fraenkel, Eyal Yifrach and Gil-Ad Shear in the Hebron area last June?

Why is Obama and the world not calling Hamas a cancer? Has Heaven perhaps lifted ISIS so that the

world can understand that ISIS and HAMAS are really one in the same?

We were always taught about the four exiles. Babylonia, followed by Persia and then Greece and finally the exile of Edom or Rome which continued through recent days. The Zohar speaks of a fifth exile, that of Yishmael in merit of his circumcision at the age of 13. Yishmael is referred to as Pereh Adam and we see this lack of humanity in ISIS and in these terrorists whether in Africa, the Middle East or Europe.

Jacob originally foresaw a partnership between his sons Esav and Jacob. He hoped that Esav would come to serve and support Jacob's Torah. Maybe this is Esav's – Edom – Rome – The West's - chance?

But before that happens America must come to realize it's grave error when it's president announces that ISIS "speaks for no religion." How naïve is he when he states that, "no faith teaches people to massacre innocents."

I will be searching for the meaning of the blessing in the curse. Let me know what you think.

Shabbat Shalom,
David

EVENTS in the Middle East today have repercussions on the streets of Britain and Europe. By: Douglas Murray

Jews are attacked here in Britain, they are blockaded into a synagogue in Paris and the chant 'Death to the Jews' is heard in Germany for the first time in 70 years.

But too few people seem to want to notice this or admit what it means. They think this is just about Israel, or just about Jewish people. It isn't. It is about all of us.

The decision last month by the Israeli government to respond to Hamas rocket-fire from Gaza is the response any government would choose if rockets were fired at its citizens. The Israeli government has the right - as does any government - to stop the bombarding of its people.

However, in recent weeks it has become plain that much of the world expects a different response from Israel. They expect Israel not to fight for the safety, security and survival of their people, but to lie down in front of the Islamic extremist enemy.

The UK government has even - disgracefully - stopped selling some arms to Israel just when the

country needs such weapons most. But in expecting Israel to behave differently from the rest of us our societies and governments reveal far more about our own state than the State of Israel.

Because the truth is that behind the demands for Israel to lie down in front of its enemies is a fatal unwillingness of our own to face the problem which is in our midst.

There are those who think that Israel is somehow the cause of the world's problems, or that in defending themselves from Islamic extremists Israel is somehow causing Islamic extremism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The extremists of Hamas are the ideological bedfellows of the extremists of ISIS who are rampaging through Syria and Iraq, crucifying and beheading as they go.

The video of the apparent beheading of American journalist James Foley by an ISIS murderer with a British accent has shocked the world. ISIS or IS are the soul-mates of Boko Haram who kidnap and kill Christian villagers in the North of Nigeria and stole 300 schoolgirls earlier this year.

They also share the exact same ideology – if not yet the same means – as those people who were found in Birmingham earlier this year teaching British pupils to hate wider British society and cut themselves off from non-Muslims.

But it is this last part of the equation which many people seem so incapable of dealing with. They see the millions of Muslims who have come to our continent and see how many of them are radical. But it is a problem they fear they cannot deal with.

They believe that if Israel just gave up fighting and disappeared that the rest of us would be able to live in peace. They see the young Muslims who stormed into a supermarket in Birmingham last weekend, trashing the products and assaulting a British policeman and they think "this is caused by Israel."

They see young Parisian Muslims throw slabs of concrete at police and set fire to cars and they think "If only Israel weren't responding to Hamas rocket-fire." And they see Imams in Germany and Italy preach that all Jewish people must be killed and they pretend that it is not a problem for all of us.

How wrong they are. The problem of anti-Semitism, and Islamic anti-Semitism in particular today, is undoubtedly a problem for Jewish people. But it is only a problem for them first. It is a problem for all of us next.

What is it that lies behind this terrible Hamas-driven rage against Israel? What lies behind the desire for Israel to disappear? Today the world is finding out.

Because behind the flags of Hamas and Hezbollah which have flown at anti-Israel

demonstrations in recent weeks is another flag. The black flag of jihad – the black flag most recently being waved in Iraq and Syria by ISIS.

Last month the black flag was flown from a car in London's Blackwall tunnel as East End Muslims blocked the traffic. At the entrance to a council estate in East London earlier this month there were anti-Israel banners and Palestinian flags. And then, on top of the lot, the black flag of jihad was flown. In Oxford Street last week Islamic extremists set up stall to try to recruit people to rally around the black flag of ISIS.

The black flag is not about Jewish people. Today in Iraq and Syria it is about Christians who ISIS is forcing to convert to Islam at gunpoint or face beheading. Many Christians are being killed by ISIS for refusing to renounce their faith. On some occasions Christians have tried to save their lives by "converting" at gunpoint and ISIS have killed them anyway.

And this is not only about Christians. It is also about other minority faiths in Islamist dominated countries. In Iraq it is also about the Yazidis, the Mandeans and other ancient beliefs which predate Islam.

The ambition of the jihadists – from al-Qaeda to Hamas, Hezbollah, Boko Haram and more – is to subjugate the entire world. It is now the duty of all decent people – including decent Muslims – to turn on these barbarians and make it clear they will not win. Rather than offer up beleaguered Israel we should send another message. That the extremists will not win in their desire to take over Israel any more than they will win in their stated desire to raise the black flag of jihad over Rome, Washington, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. Israel is not the cause of the world's problems. It is simply on the front line of them. But increasingly so are we all. And if we abandon Israel today then one day – too late – we will realise that in fact what we abandoned was ourselves.

* Douglas Murray is the Associate Director at the Henry Jackson Society

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st and 2nd Aliyot: Moshe instructs the Chosen People to eradicate any remnant of idolatry and strengthen all aspects of service to G-d. All offerings must be brought to the "Chosen" place, the Bais Hamikdash, so that worship is an act of humility and selflessness, rather than a self-indulging "need". An even greater danger to our uniqueness is the innate desire to compromise and assimilate Torah values with other forms of worship. (the Chanukah bush syndrome)

3rd and 4th Aliyot: Moshe forewarned the Jews against incorporating any pagan practices, and against the false prophet, idolatrous missionaries, and the Ir Hanidachas - the Apostate City. These must be destroyed along with their material belongings. When using the world in accordance with the wishes of the Creator, we declare the existence of a Creator who has a divine purpose for creating the material world. When we misuse the physical in the service of "gods who are not G-d", we negate the Creator's purpose for creating the universe. Therefore, they and all their belongings must be destroyed.

5th, 6th, and 7th Aliyot: The remainder of the Parsha, details those Mitzvos that set us apart from all other nations: Kashrus; Maasros - Tithes; the Shmitah - sabbatical year; the laws regarding lending money; the Eved Ivri - a Jew who is a slave; the consecration of the first born animal, and a review of the main Yomim Tovim - holidays: Pesach, Shavouth, and Succoth.

Outlooks & Insights by Rabbi Zev Leff The Love of Kindness

Grant truth to Jacob, kindness Abraham, as you swore to our forefathers from ancient times (Michah 7:20) In the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the seven-year shemittah cycle, Jews living in Eretz Yisrael were commanded to separate a tenth of their crops and bring them to Jerusalem to eat. In the third and six years of the cycle, that tenth was given to the poor as ma'aser ani.

At first glance, it would seem that the order of ma'aser sheni and ma'aser ani should have been reversed. Why were the landowners not required to first share with the poor and only subsequently to enjoy their produce in Jerusalem. In other words, why was ma'aser ani not given at the beginning of the three-year cycle, and only then ma'aser sheni?

Rambam (Hilchos Matnos Aniyim 10:2) writes that one must give tzedakah with a joyous countenance, and that giving with a disgruntled mien negates the mitzvah. Thus we see that the attitude with which one gives tzedakah is intrinsic to the mitzvah itself.

The prophet Michah (5:17) defines that which G-d wants from us as "to do justice, love, chesed, and walk modestly with G-d." And in the concluding blessing of Shemoneh Esrei we thank Hashem for giving us, "through the light of His countenance a Torah of life and a love of chesed." It is not enough to do chesed. One must love chesed.

More than any other positive commandment, writes Rambam, tzedakah is a sign of the essence of a Jew. It is the very fiber of Jewish existence and the source of our future redemption. (Pirkei Avos 2:13), refers to an attitude which fosters chesed.

The goal of our striving in this world is the perfection of our neshamos. The mitzvos are the means to achieving this goal. There are two mitzvos which enable us to emulate Hashem as He relates to us. ON is talmud Torah. Through the study of Torah we attach ourselves to G-d's mind, as it were, as He created the world. The second is chesed. The basis of all existence is G-d's desire to do chesed to His creation. Hence when we do acts of chesed with a strong desire, we follow in Hashem's footsteps.

Avraham discovered Hashem through the characteristic of chesed of recognizing the chesed inherent in the creation. He so longed to perform acts of chesed, that even when he sat in great agony after his own bris milah, he suffered when no guests appeared. Our mother Rivkah, too, was distinguished by her love of chesed. It was for that quality alone that Eliezer tested her.

We are now prepared to understand the order of ma'aser sheni and ma'aser ani. By commanding us to bring one-tenth of our crops to Jerusalem to rejoice there, Hashem taught us two vital lessons. The first is that our material possessions are a present from Hashem and He can dictate how we use that material bounty. The second is that using material wealth in the way prescribed by Hashem generates feelings of joy and sanctity.

Once we have internalized these lessons in the first two years of the cycle, we can offer that bounty to the poor in the third year — not perfunctorily but with a true love of chesed.

The letters of Elul hint to the verse, "am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me," signifying our intensified relationship with Hashem leading up to the Yamim Noraim. To achieve this we must condition ourselves not only to do chesed but to love it.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Any [fish] that has fins and scales you may eat." (Debarim 14:9)

The Gemara (Kidushin 29a) teaches us that a father is obligated to teach his son many things. Among them is to teach him Torah and one opinion says he must teach him to swim. Rabbi Yosef

Shalom Elyashiv zt"l questions why swimming? If we are afraid that he might drown, there is also the possibility that he might be hurt on dry land by thieves and murderers, so why don't we also teach him the art of self-defense and how to use a sword? If we want the boy to be in good physical shape, why choose only swimming? How about other forms of exercise?

Rav Elyashiv explains that if a tree falls into the river, it will float and not sink to the depths of the river. However, we cannot say that the log can swim. Swimming means that the swimmer could go in any direction he pleases, but the log could only go in the direction of the current. The definition of a swimmer is that he can swim against the current and the waves. The destiny of a Jew is that he will be swimming on the water amongst the gentile nations. He cannot allow himself to rely on the waves to travel because then he will end up in a place that they want him to be. The Jew must be able to say that he wishes to go to the place he wants to go and his own feet will take him there.

This is what the Gemara means that the father must teach the son to swim against the current and not to be afraid of the noise of the mighty rushing waters. He should learn how to control his situation.

The Midrash compares us to fish, "and may they reproduce abundantly like fish within the land" (Beresheet 48:18). The fish have two kosher signs, fins and scales. The fins are the sign of the ability to swim, to overcome the place and times of society. This is done by the father teaching his son Torah. The other kosher sign is the scales. The scales protect the fish like armor. This is the Torah and observance of misvot that protect and save him. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"[If your Hebrew slave] says to you, 'I shall not go out from you' because he loves you and your house because he fares well with you" (Debarim 15:16)

The Gemara teaches that the owner of a Hebrew slave must treat him and view him as an equal in every respect, and he sometimes even has to treat him as a superior! However, the Gemara also teaches that if two Jews are in dire need of water, and only one of them has a jug of water, his own life takes precedence, and he is not obligated to give the water to the other person. Why is this case different than the case of the slave who must be treated at least as an equal, if not better?

A poor man and a rich man can live in harmony with one another, even though the poor man can't satisfy his physical needs like the rich man. Still yet, he does not feel inferior in any way to his friend as a human being. The slave, on the other hand, is always reminded of his bitter status as a mere servant of another man. Therefore the Torah

goes out of its way to demand special treatment for him.

There is a very important lesson to be learned from this. We must understand that different people have different sensitivities. We must recognize each person's uniqueness, and treat him in a way that we will not hurt his feelings or make him self-conscious of his station in life. Let's take it upon ourselves now, as we approach the selihot season, to treat our fellow man with the proper respect, and to make amends with those to whom we may have shown disservice to in the past. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Rabbi Wein

A STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE

The Jewish nation is described in the Torah as being a stiff-necked people. In the context of that particular Torah discussion this description of the people of Israel is not necessarily a complimentary one. It refers to the stubbornness of the generation of the desert of Sinai and their rebellious nature in constantly refusing to abide by God's will and to accept Moshe's authority and rule.

Neither plagues nor wars, natural disasters such as serpents and poisonous snakes and supernatural punishments, seem to break their stubborn nature. That generation of the desert of Sinai, those who left Egypt, stood at the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai, survived on manna from heaven and water from the rock, still never lost their attachment to the culture and slavery of Egypt.

At every turn in the desert we read that they complained and said: "Let us turn our heads round and travel back to Egypt." Part of the nature of stubbornness is the inability to admit past error and to recalculate decisions, attitudes and policies. In the case of the generation of the desert of Sinai, this trait of stubbornness led to tragic consequences.

This generation, which possessed such greatness – the rabbis characterized that generation of the desert of Sinai as being a generation of great knowledge and superior potential wisdom – somehow doomed itself to destruction because of its stiff-necked stubbornness and preconceived negative attitudes. Because of this history of Jewish stubbornness, the phrase "a stiff-necked people" has entered the Jewish lexicon as a very negative trait.

Yet, in the long view of Jewish history over the millennia of its troubles and travails, exiles and persecutions, it is clear that it is this very nature of Jewish stubbornness that has preserved us until this day. Only a stiff-necked people could have survived

and retained its identity, its faith, its culture and its vision of eventual destiny over so many years and obstacles.

We are alive simply because of the fact that we are a very stubborn people. Only a stubborn people would have survived the destruction of its Temple and exile from its land and still somehow returned to build it anew after so many years of absence and distance.

A stiff-necked people refuses to succumb to passing fads and imagined political correctness. A stiff-necked people realizes that a small minority can hold correct views and beliefs while more often than not overwhelming majorities are wrong in their policies and faiths.

The great rebbe of Kotzk phrased it correctly and pithily: "Truth can never be outvoted." So the trait of stubbornness and being stiff-necked has enabled the Jewish people to survive long and bitter centuries of exile and to restore itself to its land, independence and influence. It certainly has served us well through our travels in world history.

The Jewish people, especially here in Israel have exhibited tremendous fortitude, determination and resolute stubbornness over the past few weeks of our struggle with Hamas. Innumerable rockets have fallen on the Jewish population in the Land of Israel without breaking our spirit or crippling our justified response. It is not only the Iron Dome antimissile system that has protected us, though one should be awestruck at its efficiency and abilities, but it is the iron will and stubbornness of the Jewish people that has also protected us in this hour of need.

Other civilian populations have succumbed to such bombardments. In World War II, Poland and the Netherlands were broken by the Luftwaffe. However, Great Britain survived the Blitz and later the V1 and V2 rocket attacks even though it suffered more than sixty thousand civilian casualties therefrom. But this ability is currently doubtful, at least in the eyes of this observer of the current world.

Little such fortitude remains in Western society today. There are very few stubborn people left on the globe generally. But the trait of stubbornness has survived well and healthy within the people of Israel. It is undoubtedly part of our DNA makeup. Applied correctly and in proper measure and fitting circumstances, stubbornness and being stiff-necked can be a great virtue, a most positive character and national trait.

The world looks at us as being too stubborn and unreasonable. In a culture where moral equivalency prevails and there is no right or wrong, the world is disturbed by our stubbornness and by our refusing to somehow just let things be, even when our very existence is challenged by the actions of a murderous enemy.

If our enemies and our friends as well would but look at our history and our accomplishments they would realize the positive nature of our stubbornness and respect us for it instead of criticizing us. So we will undoubtedly continue to be a stiff-necked people.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

One of the gifts of great leaders, and one from which each of us can learn, is that they frame reality for the group. They define its situation. They specify its aims. They articulate its choices. They tell us where we are and where we are going in a way no satellite navigation system could. They show us the map and the destination, and help us see why we should choose this route not that. That is one of their most magisterial roles, and no one did it more powerfully than did Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here is how he does it at the beginning of this week's parsha: See, I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (Deut. 11: 26-28)

Here, in even more powerful words, is how he puts it later in the book: See, I set before you today life and the good, death and the bad... This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life so you and your children after you may live. (Deut. 30: 15, 19)

What Moses is doing here is defining reality for the next generation and for all generations. He is doing so as a preface to what is about to follow in the next many chapters, namely a systematic restatement of Jewish law covering all aspects of life for the new nation in its land.

Moses does not want the people to lose the big picture by being overwhelmed by the details. Jewish law with its 613 commands is detailed. It aims at the sanctification of all aspects of life, from daily ritual to the very structure of society and its institutions. Its aim is to shape a social world in which we turn even

seemingly secular occasions into encounters with the Divine presence. Despite the details, says Moses, the choice I set before you is really quite simple.

We, he tells the next generation, are unique. We are a small nation. We have not the numbers, the wealth nor the sophisticated weaponry of the great empires. We are smaller even than many of our neighbouring nations. As of now we do not even have a land. But we are different, and that difference defines once-and-for-all who we are and why. God has chosen to make us His stake in history. He set us free from slavery and took us as His own covenantal partner.

This is not because of our merits. "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land" (Deut. 9: 5). We are not more righteous than others, said Moses. It is because our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah – were the first people to heed the call of the one God and follow him, worshipping not nature but the Creator of nature, not power but justice and compassion, not hierarchy but a society of equal dignity that includes within its ambit of concern the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Do not think, says Moses, that we can survive as a nation among nations, worshipping what they worship and living as they live. If we do, we will be subject to the universal law that has governed the fate of nations from the dawn of civilization to today. Nations are born, they grow, they flourish, they become complacent, then corrupt, then divided, then defeated, then they die, to be remembered only in history books and museums. In the case of Israel, small and intensely vulnerable, that fate will happen sooner rather than later. That is what Moses calls "the curse."

The alternative is simple – even though it is demanding and detailed. It means taking God as our sovereign, judge of our deeds, framer of our laws, author of our liberty, defender of our destiny, object of our worship and our love. If we predicate our existence on something – some One – vastly greater than ourselves then we will be lifted higher than we could reach by ourselves. But that needs total loyalty to God and His law. That is the only way we will avoid decay, decline and defeat.

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy. The word "love" (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word "joy" (root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in

Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

Moses knows that people often think and act in short-term ways, preferring today's pleasure to tomorrow's happiness, personal advantage to the good of society as a whole. They do foolish things, individually and collectively. So throughout Devarim he insists time and again that the road to long-term flourishing – the 'good,' the 'blessing,' life itself – consists in making one simple choice: accept God as your sovereign, do His will, and blessings will follow. If not, sooner or later you will be conquered and dispersed and you will suffer more than you can imagine. Thus Moses defined reality for the Israelites of his time and all time.

What has this to do with leadership? The answer is that the meaning of events is never self-evident. It is always subject to interpretation. Sometimes, out of folly or fear or failure of imagination, leaders get it wrong. Neville Chamberlain defined the challenge of the rise to power of Nazi Germany as the search for "peace in our time." It took a Churchill to realise that this was wrong, and that the real challenge was the defence of liberty against tyranny.

In Lincoln's day there were any number of people for and against slavery but it took Lincoln to define the abolition of slavery as the necessary step to the preservation of the union. It was that larger vision that allowed him to say, in the Second Inaugural, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds ..." He allowed neither abolition itself, nor the end of the Civil War, to be seen as a victory for one side over the other but instead defined it as a victory for the nation as a whole.

I explained in my book on religion and science, *The Great Partnership*, that there is a difference between the cause of something and its meaning. The search for causes is the task of explanation. The search for meaning is the work of interpretation. Science can explain but it cannot interpret. Were the ten plagues in Egypt a natural sequence of events, or Divine punishment, or both? There is no scientific experiment that could resolve this question. Was the division of the Red Sea a Divine intervention in history or a freak easterly wind exposing a submerged and ancient river bank? Was the Exodus an act of Divine liberation or a series of lucky

coincidences that allowed a group of fugitive slaves to escape? When all the causal explanations have been given, the quality of miracle – an epoch-changing event in which we see the hand of God – remains. Culture is not nature. There are causes in nature, but only in culture are there meanings. *Homo sapiens* is uniquely the culture-creating, meaning-seeking animal, and this affects all we do.

Viktor Frankl, the psychotherapist who survived Auschwitz, used to emphasize that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us – and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively.

That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality."^[1]

Within every family, every community, and every organisation, there are trials, tests and tribulations. Do these lead to arguments, blame and recrimination? Or does the group see them providentially, as a route to some future good (a "descent that leads to an ascent" as the Lubavitcher Rebbe always used to say)? Does it work together to meet the challenge? Much, perhaps all, will depend on how the group defines its reality. This in turn will depend on the leadership or absence of leadership that it has had until now. Strong families and communities have a clear sense of what their ideals are, and they are not blown off-course by the winds of change.

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life and death, the blessing and the curse, following God on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilizations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change.

Who are we? Where are we? What are we trying to achieve and what kind of people do we aspire to be? These are the questions leaders help the group ask and answer, and when a group does so together it is blessed with exceptional resilience and strength.

